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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the issues pertinent to year-round education (YRE). YRE addresses two key problems: (1) making efficient use of current school facilities; and (2) maximizing student learning outcomes. The various forms for implementing YRE at the local level--pilot schools, schools-within-a-school, plan-within-a-plan, and paired and clustered schools--are highlighted. Proponents argue that YRE results in more efficient use of school facilities, improved student and teacher attendance, fewer student discipline problems, and less stressful teaching conditions. Management problems, however, involve the following areas: coordinating the school schedule with student teacher schedules, coordinating the school schedule with family schedules, scheduling personnel meetings; administrator fatigue, longterm planning for the instructional program; and startup expenditures. Policy makers should also consider YRE's potential impact on school finances, student achievement, and families and communities. (LMI)

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YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION

Year-round education addresses two key problems: the need to use present school facilities most efficiently in districts with growing student populations and the need to maximize student learning outcomes, particularly for students with special needs. In the former case, districts that experience a combination of overcrowded schools and taxpayer refusal to pass school bond proposals or raise taxes are turning to year-round education as a means of accommodating more students in existing school facilities. In the latter case, year-long services have been available for special education students for a number of years, based on the belief that continued instruction during the summer months reduces students' skill loss. Proponents of year-round education state that it makes the most of learning time for all students: those students achieving at the norm as well as at-risk students, gifted and talented students, and students with disabilities.

The number of year-round schools in the United States has ebbed and flowed. After a number of experiments in the early 1900s ended, the concept lay dormant until the late 1960s. By 1976, more than 600 schools in 28 states operated on year-round schedules. By 1980 they had declined to 287 schools, but another resurgence of interest brought the number to more than 1800 schools in 26 states by 1992. Ninety percent of these schools were located in three states: California, Nevada, and Utah. Texas was behind only California in terms of numbers of students served in such schools. The vast majority are elementary schools, which appear to adapt to the scheduling demands more readily than secondary schools (Carriedo & Goren, 1989).

Mechanisms for local implementation

Districts can implement year-round education programs in a number of different ways (Merrell, 1980). Each of the following mechanisms responds to a particular set of district needs and objectives.

Pilot schools. One school or one set of feeder schools (i.e., a high school paired with its students' junior high and elementary schools) is selected to implement a year-round program. This model includes magnet schools that offer specialized programs centralized in one school and allow students from throughout the district to attend.

Schools-within-a-school. A year-round calendar and a nine-month calendar are both offered in the same building, with a portion of the student body attending each.

Plan-within-a-plan. Both calendars are offered in the same instructional program. For example, a year-round schedule that organizes the entire school's curriculum in six-week units enables "families that desire the nine-month calendar [to] choose the six six-week periods that fall between September and June. Those wishing a year-round calendar can select any of the eight six-week periods" (Merrell, 1980, p. 44).

Paired and clustered schools. In larger districts, neighborhood schools are paired or clustered into groups of three or four. One or more offers a year-round schedule while others offer the traditional nine-month plan.

Schools can select from a wide variety of year-round scheduling plans: the 45-15 plan (45 school days attendance followed by 15 school days of vacation); the similar 60-20 plan; the 60-15 plan (which provides a common July vacation for all tracks); the Concept 6 plan (six terms of 43 days each); the Concept 8 plan (eight six-week blocks); the quarter plan

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(four twelve-week periods); the quinmester plan (five nine-week terms); and a number of flexible plans. In 1992, the most common schedules were 90-30; 60-20; 45-15; 60-15; and Concept 6. There were no Concept 8 schools, and fully half of all year-round schools were single-track. Each scheduling plan has the potential to provide opportunity for learning benefits to students; multi-track arrangements also can increase school capacities by 33 percent or more (Merrell, 1980). Again, the district's particular needs and the community's preferences will guide the selection of a specific scheduling and tracking plan for year-round education.

Implementation benefits and difficulties

Proponents and practitioners state that year-round education brings fiscal relief to the district, positive educational outcomes to students, and additional benefits to the school community as a whole. Among these are:

- more efficient use of school facilities (e.g., use throughout the school year, less need for new buildings and/or higher taxes, conservation of fuel);
- improved student and teacher attendance;
- fewer student discipline problems;
- less stressful teaching conditions;
- greater career flexibility (e.g., extended teaching contracts, cross-track or specialized teaching) and increased salaries for teachers who teach throughout the year;
- more diversified, enriched curriculum and instruction;
- remediation or acceleration opportunities for special needs students during vacation intersessions;
- greater retention of learning for all students (i.e., less learning loss during breaks between school sessions/years);
- accelerated completion of graduation requirements;
- increased learning time for disadvantaged gifted students;
- decreased school dropout rates due to expanded remedial instruction and re-entry opportunities in the school system; and
- less vandalism in schools.

A number of implementation difficulties also have been reported. Many of these are management problems that might be expected with the introduction of any new organizational design, and most appear in schools that implement multi-track programs. The literature reports problems in the following areas:

- coordinating the school schedule with student teacher schedules (though the addition of a summer quarter for student teaching seems to offset this difficulty);
- coordinating multi-track schedules in secondary schools;
- coordinating schedules for families of students attending different schools;
- scheduling meetings for school personnel in multi-track schools;
- maintaining a unified effort for both staff and parents;
- accomplishing long-term planning for the instructional program;
- transition difficulties (e.g., curriculum changes when schools switch from 9-month to year-round, lack of support for teachers on different tracks in adapting to such changes as sharing rooms and storing materials);
- administrator fatigue in multi-track schools;
- parent objections; and
- start-up expenses and modifications to existing buildings to accommodate a multi-track year-round program.

Policymaking considerations

In considering the feasibility of encouraging or mandating the implementation of year-round schools, policymakers will want to address three sets of questions (Burnett, 1979):

1. How do single- and multi-track year-round education programs compare with traditional-calendar education in terms of capital, operating, and start-up costs, both in the short term and long term?

2. Will the year-round schedule affect student achievement? If so, how?

3. What attitudes will students, parents, teachers, and community members have toward the program? Will attitudes change?

Answers to the first two questions require up-to-date information from schools and districts currently implementing year-round programs. Policymakers will want to consider both fiscal impact and student achievement outcomes over time. The third question has implications for the policy guidance that is needed to enable districts to implement year-round education successfully. The following sections present some of the available research results in these three areas.

Fiscal impact. A cost analysis of nine school districts in California, Illinois, and Virginia concluded that "careful implementation of a year-round school program can result in substantial cost savings" (Burnett, 1979, p. 29). A multi-track program pro-

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duces overall operational savings as well as capital savings. Burnett asserted that long-term costs and benefits of implementing year-round education can be accurately analyzed only by comparing the existing situation at a school with a simulation of the situation under the proposed calendar, (i.e., the population, pupil/teacher ratio, curriculum, etc. must be held constant). His rationale for using such an evaluation method is to control for two common types of expenditure that should be external to a true comparison of economic impact: (1) the transition to a multi-track year-round education program requires additional start-up costs, and (2) the year-round education program typically serves as a catalyst for many changes not related to the program—changes that bear costs of their own. Burnett suggested that the most important policy and planning variables related to long-term cost are: staffing ratio, construction costs, classrooms not used for basic instruction, and teacher compensation. Changes in any of these variables can reduce or increase savings significantly.

An example of how dramatic these changes can be is found in Houston, Texas. The final 1984-85 evaluation report for year-round schools in Houston, Texas stated that the cost of converting schools to year-round represented a 33.8% increase in the average cost per pupil (Guthrie, 1985). However, in addition to incurring start-up costs, the district implemented some costly inter-session programs. These programs may account for more of the cost increase than did conversion. Further, costs can decline radically in the program's later years. For example, in the second year of implementation, one of the Houston schools showed only a 6.7% increase in the average cost per pupil while traditional elementary schools in the district showed an 8.5% increase.

Changes in student achievement. While research is not conclusive about the speed at which positive outcomes occur, a number of changes in student achievement can nevertheless be reported. The Houston evaluation report concluded that the dominant successes of the year-round education program focused on educational benefits (Guthrie, 1985). Evaluators found greater student achievement gains in the year-round program. A comparison of student scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) before and after they attended a year-round school showed a composite average normal curve equivalent (NCE) gain higher than a sample of students who continued to attend a school with the traditional schedule. Furthermore, the mean gains for students in the year-round school were significantly different from the comparison schools. Evaluators cautioned that results of any first-year program should, of course, be viewed conservatively; and some believe that Houston's intensive inter-session programs, rather than the year-round education program itself, may have produced these gains.

San Diego Unified School District released a longitudinal report in March 1991 comparing test scores in traditional and year-round schools from spring 1982 through spring 1990. Results of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) for grades 1-6 and the California Assessment Program (CAP) for grades 3 and 6 were included (Alcorn, 1991). The report revealed significant differences in the percentage of year-round schools that maintained or improved student scores compared to the results for traditional schools. The average percent change in scores was also significantly higher in year-round schools. For example, grade 5 showed:

- 59% of traditional schools maintained or improved CTBS reading scores, with an average percent change of +1.0.
- 81% of year-round schools maintained or improved CTBS reading scores, with an average percent change of +7.3.

There appears to be a difference in performance between types of year-round schools, as well. For example, grade 3 showed:

- 60% of traditional schools maintained or improved CAP reading scores, with an average percent change of +4.6.
- 68% of year-round schools maintained or improved CAP reading scores, with an average percent change of +14.3.
- 80% of multitrack year-round schools maintained or improved CAP reading scores, with an average percent change of +18.5.

Other current reports of the positive impact of year-round education on student achievement include the following:

- A state-wide evaluation of Utah's year-round and extended-day schools by Brigham Young University, under contract with the Utah State Department of Education (Van Mondfrans *et al*, 1989);
- A comparison of CAP scores in the Oxnard School District, Ventura County, California, with state CAP scores (Oxnard School District, 1989). The report examines gains over a six-year period.

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weighing the strengths and weaknesses of year-round school scheduling options, they will want to assess how the various models and tracking arrangements fit the economic and demographic needs of the district or state. Any year-round education model has potential for improving instruction and student outcomes, but a multi-track model is needed only if the district or state is also experiencing an economic and growth environment that demands space efficiency. Policymakers also will want to examine options for implementing the selected model district-wide, to look at long-term economic costs and potential educational benefits to all children in a particular locality.

There are research findings, though limited, that suggest year-round education brings fiscal relief to the district, positive educational outcomes to students, and additional benefits to the school community and learning environment as a whole (e.g., more satisfied teachers, improved curricula). As state and local policymakers consider the feasibility of implementing a year-round school model in their districts, they will want to compare actual outcomes documented by year-round schools with those of traditionally-scheduled schools. There is research support for the following conclusions:

1. The **fiscal implications** of year-round schools are not as simply drawn as once thought. Implementation yields savings in classroom construction, but these savings are tempered by two sources of additional costs: conversion of schools to accommodate multi-track year-round scheduling (i.e., initial start-up costs) and implementation of other school changes not related to but inspired by the shift to a year-round model (e.g., costs associated with inter-session activities). Another source of savings, however, is found over time; research suggests that, after the initial year of implementation, the average cost per pupil of operating a year-round school is lower than that of operating a traditionally-scheduled school.

2. Both first-year and longitudinal evaluations of **student achievement** suggest greater gains on standardized achievement tests (e.g., ITBS, CTBS, and the California Assessment Program) in year-round schools. Differences are found among types of year-round schools as well, with the highest scores and greatest percent change found in multi-track year-round schools when compared to the total performance of all year-round schools.

3. Converting schools to year-round scheduling has a significant **impact on families and communities** that must be considered in order to gain public support rather than resistance to implementation. A new school schedule directly affects family life outside of schooling, which then produces a domino effect in other community sectors. These impacts need to be factored in during the exploration and decision-making processes to ensure community buy-in and a smooth implementation. ◆

This issue of INSIGHTS was written by Sue E. Mutchler, Policy Associate. For a copy of the Policymaker's Rapid Response Information Packet on Year-Round Education contact Lonne Parent, (512) 476-6861.

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